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ABSTRACT

In 1971, a management consulting firm undertook a case study of the Columbia University libraries to improve library performance by reviewing and strengthening the organization and recasting staff composition and deployment patterns. To implement the study's recommendations, an administrative structure was proposed which would emphasize functional relationships and take full advantage of subject and operational specialties among the staff. The final report of the study was thoroughly reviewed by library staff of all levels, and opportunities were provided for staff input. Because the study recommendations were not detailed enough to permit direct implementation, a preimplementation planning process was conceived to proceed in three discrete but interrelated phases concerned with organization, staffing, and operations. With this basis, the library's on-going program of operational planning is taking place in the context of a fully documented organization. Each operating unit and position is fully defined, and a program accounting budget has been developed to provide additional data. The new organization is the starting point for the evolutionary change which the management study and restructuring were intended to permit. (Author/SL)

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THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

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During recent years much attention has been paid to the general subject of the administration of research libraries, prompted in large part by the growing complexity and increasing costs of these important organizations. Much of this analytical work has been stimulated by the Council on Library Resources, Inc., working closely with the Association of Research Libraries. As part of the ARL program, and with CLR participation and financial support, a major review of the organization and staffing of the Columbia University Libraries was conducted by a management consulting firm, Booz, Allen & Hamilton, Inc.[1] The result of this work, a published report, has been the basis for change at Columbia and has influenced similar efforts at a number of other academic and research libraries as well. This report records in brief form the methods used in converting the consultants' report into action.

The case study performed at the Columbia University Libraries in 1971 was undertaken to improve library performance by reviewing and strengthening the organization and recasting staff composition and deployment patterns. The recommendations which emerged from that study were designed to improve operating effectiveness and to enhance individual staff performance and job satisfaction. The overall goals were to provide an organization which would be more responsive to needs generated by a changing university and which would provide improved opportunities for individuals to develop professionally.

To achieve organizational effectiveness, an administrative structure was recommended which would emphasize functional relationships and take full advantage of subject and operational specializations among the staff. The key proposal to accomplish this change was the formation of three sub-structures:

- A Resources Group, responsible for collection development, bibliographic control and specialized reference or resource application programs. A particular concern of this unit is to link resource development with resource utilization. Located here are bibliographers, catalogers, resource program development staff, and ultimately certain reference librarians.

- A Services Group, with its staff specializing in the delivery of library services and responsible for day-to-day public contact, user assistance and user facilities -- in the eyes of many patrons, the most visible aspect of library operations. Here, the development of ever higher levels of expertise in providing library services is a primary objective. Circulation activities, photocopy equipment, access tools and other reader services are located in this major unit.

- A Support Group, responsible for the business and processing functions required to support all aspects of library operations. The underlying principle here was to consolidate the many activities which sustain the library as an enterprise. Here are found the acquisitions processing units, facilities and supplies maintenance, bibliographic searching, systems input preparation and quality control, and collection preservation activities.

The effect of these proposed changes and other organizational recommendations contained in the study was judged to be of such potential impact that several needs related to implementation were apparent to the Libraries' administration. First, because of the size and complexity of the Libraries, there was a need to thoroughly analyze and refine the recommendations to be sure they were realistic and viable. For the same reasons, it was necessary to specify in great detail what the new organization would be and how it would work. Finally, it was important to achieve within the staff broad comprehension of the significance of the report and its implications by engaging the maximum number of professional staff members in the analysis and determination of the new structure and operating mode. It was believed that widespread staff participation would apply to these tasks the collective intelligence and breadth of library experience represented in the staff, whether that experience derived from years of responsibility in librarianship or recent graduate study in library school. Further, it would allow scrutiny of the recommendations by library professionals intimately familiar with the Columbia library system to ensure that the proposed organization changes would work. Above all, it was believed essential to the spirit of the recommendations and to the success of the changes that the staff play an active role in determining the structure and direction of the new organization.

When the work of the consultants was complete, their report was thoroughly reviewed at all levels of the Libraries' administration and staff. The Director of Libraries, with the study team, conducted a series of staff meetings to describe and explain the recommendations. These provided opportunities for the staff to understand the report and its implications, to discuss them and to respond to them. All staff members were invited to write their reactions to the report and any of its particulars. The Libraries' eight standing committees were also requested to review the report in the context of their special interests. Out of these meticulous review efforts some seventy pages of comments came as memoranda and reports. The consensus was that the concepts and recommendations of the study were fundamentally sound and logical, and that the Libraries would benefit from their application to our environment. Staff members disagreed with many specific details of the recommendations, but basically accepted and supported the general changes proposed.

It was clear when the report was issued that the study and its recommendations were thorough, but not detailed enough or of a nature to permit direct implementation. They were regarded as guidelines for the Libraries' organization and responsibilities, but not necessarily as complete or sacrosanct specifications. The initial review activities were the first steps in a careful examination of the report and delineation of organization details which could be installed in an orderly manner with minimal disruption to service and operations. The work of preparing the Libraries for the new structure and for changes in staffing was conceived as a planning process independent of the actual implementation, with the planning to proceed in three discrete but interrelated phases concerned with organization, staffing and operations.

The first phase, Organization Definition, resulted in a detailed description of each unit in terms of its objectives, functional responsibilities, reporting and working relationships, and performance criteria.[2] Phase two, Staffing Description, determined general staffing patterns and assessed the immediate impact of the new administrative structure on all professional staff responsibilities. Phase three, Operations Planning, has been a continuing effort directed toward the programs of the Libraries.

The progress which was made in planning and implementing the study recommendations was possible in large part because of events which took place within the University administration at the same time that the study team was engaged in its work. In an independent and unrelated effort, the University administration undertook a review of the organization structure of the University itself. Among other findings, it was concluded that all of the University's information resources would be more effectively coordinated with academic programs if they were better integrated into the University's academic planning and decision-making structure. Toward this end, a new position was created within a reorganized University administration -- Vice President for Information Services and University Librarian, reporting to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. This position was assigned responsibility for the University's major information and academic support resources, including the Libraries, the Computer Center, and several other diverse but related academic information units. Although the study team recommended that the University Librarian be a vice president, the action of the University went beyond that recommendation by its administrative consolidation of libraries and all other information resources. In both cases the underlying principle was the same, namely that academic programs and their information-based support are intimately related and that planning for both of them should take place in concert.

In a sense, although the University's decision was independent of the case study, it had the effect of beginning the implementation process. Several other key recommendations of the study were implemented shortly after the report was published and these were instrumental in getting the full-scale implementation started. The Planning

Office was established with the designation of an Assistant University Librarian for Planning, and the Personnel Office was reoriented toward the recommendations through the designation of the Assistant University Librarian for Personnel. Two standing committees were established as a means to apply in special situations the experience and competence of professional staff members at all levels of the organization. The first of these, the ten-member Professional Advisory Committee, was charged with providing comprehensive professional advice and counsel to the University Librarian, and with conducting specific studies in professional areas. The second, the six-member Staff Development Committee, was made responsible for the review and recommendation of staff development plans and for individual professional staff performance review for purposes of recommending professional advancement. Each of these committees was to accomplish its special studies through the appointment of special task forces drawn from throughout the Libraries as well as from within the committee itself.

The designation of these positions and the appointment of the two committees to replace the former eight standing committees provided a framework within which the detailed planning for the new organization could take place.

The actual procedure followed during the Organization Definition phase of planning which produced the detailed unit descriptions was coordinated through the Professional Advisory Committee. The Committee formed the core of three major task forces. In total, about half the professional staff of the Libraries actively participated in the work. The first task force reviewed the basic premises of the study report at the highest levels of the recommended organization. It validated or modified the structure of the first and second levels of the organization and carefully described all the units comprising these levels. Based on these unit definitions, the second task force extended the descriptions to the most detailed level of the organization, making modifications to previously defined units or structural relationships based on further scrutiny and analysis. The third task force addressed itself to the so-called allied libraries. After each round of analysis and definition, the work was reviewed by the Libraries' staff, the senior administrative body of the Libraries, and the Professional Advisory Committee.

The charge to the task forces called for them to consider thoughtfully the case study recommendations and the review documents prepared by the staff in response to the study. They were urged to consult with knowledgeable staff members when necessary in order to resolve issues, but not to re-create the study. Instead, they were to work with the study report as a guide and to develop in detail for the proposed organization the elements and relationships which would achieve the principles of the report. If conflicts arose with the study recommendations or within the task force, the members were urged to seek facts and make decisions. The task forces responsibly fulfilled their charge and created an organization which adheres to the spirit of the

study and delineates a realistic and effective administrative structure. Where the revised organization varies from the original recommendations, the differences are logical refinements which preserve the essence of the recommendations while contributing to more effective coordination of library activities, orderly transition to the new arrangement, and implementation within the limits of existing budgets.

When the work of defining the organization was completed, a task force of the Staff Development Committee proceeded to reconcile existing professional staff positions with positions required in the new organization. This work disclosed that in most cases position responsibilities had not drastically changed. Instead, there was a reasonably close correspondence between most positions in the old and the new organizations. There were, however, some reconstituted positions, most of which had identifiable counterparts in the old organization. In addition, some entirely new positions were created, most of them supervisory or managerial. While the impact on responsibilities of specific positions was moderate, one primary result of the rigorous organization definition and review was the re-arrangement of the organization's component units, thus establishing new reporting relationships. The changes which took place were structural rather than procedural, so that there were minimal immediate changes in day-to-day operations. Rather, by bringing together in a new way the functionally related organization elements with common goals underlying the broad purposes of the Libraries, the capacity was established for achieving those goals more effectively. Further, by relating functional and subject specializations to library objectives and by creating mechanisms for broadened responsibilities, new opportunities were created for staff members to enrich their experience, at their choice, and to grow professionally and personally.

When positions which had been affected and newly-created positions were identified, a second task force of the Staff Development Committee prepared detailed position descriptions for them based on the description of their present unit. These position descriptions were developed to help individuals understand the scope of their new responsibilities. They also contributed to the recruiting process and staffing of the new organization by delineating each position carefully enough to establish qualifications and seek candidates for it. Both professional and supporting positions were described in terms of function, with an indication of the relative priority and time required for each function. In addition, the authority assigned the position, required qualifications, and reporting relationships were included.

The work of defining the organization and establishing staffing requirements opened the way for implementing the revised recommendations, and that process promptly began. Concurrently, a number of new activities were initiated, and others which had begun earlier, independent of the study, were intensified, to achieve the study's long-term staffing objectives. These included the development in the Personnel Office of a two-track schedule of position categories and pro-

fessional ranks as a tool to relate individual performance and professional responsibilities to salary administration and staff development. In conjunction with this, the Staff Development Committee developed a format and procedure for regular performance appraisal. Further, a Staff Development Officer was appointed to administer training and development programs for professional and supporting staff members.

The Libraries' on-going program of operational planning is taking place in the context of a fully-documented organization in which each operating unit and each position is defined in terms of its essential characteristics to permit review, evaluation and support on both the organizational and individual level. In addition, the Libraries' budget has been restructured to facilitate fiscal analysis and control within major segments of the organization, as well as across organization lines. Further, a program accounting technique of cost analysis has been developed to provide additional data and insights into library activities. A permanent planning structure has been established, based on a high-level planning and policy committee, to apply these tools to the enhancement of the Libraries and to guide the development of plans. Finally, a policy manual is in preparation to guide decision-making and to encourage the distribution of authority throughout the Libraries.

The organization description process afforded an opportunity for a thorough evaluation of the role each functional unit would play in the context of the overall mission of the Libraries, and of the criteria used to measure accomplishments. The thorough and comprehensive nature of this work was important for several reasons. The proposed organization underscored some new concepts of the place of the library in the university environment. The process of analysis provided a mechanism for each individual to reassess his personal assignment in the context of new relationships and to realize fully the potential and significance of the changes. One of the primary goals of the reorganization was to provide better opportunities for individuals to broaden their experience, take advantage of their diversity of interests and expertise, develop professionally, and consequently function more effectively and in a personally satisfying manner. The intense analytic and evaluative activity during the process of organization definition permitted staff members to develop an understanding of library service obligations and their own responsibilities in terms which could ultimately be linked to individual objectives and be made rewarding in personal terms.

Hence, the articulation of the Libraries' reason for being and the redefinition of structure was significant for its involvement of a majority of the professional staff at all levels of experience and responsibility, and for the opportunity it afforded them to influence the direction and form of the organization. However, the process was equally important for the organization plan which resulted. In addition to a set of operating relationships, it has formed the basis of a structure and procedure for the ongoing planning and review of library activities on a unit by unit basis. The unit definitions are a documentary base

for the periodic examination of goals, evaluation of progress or activity relative to those goals, and adjustment of resources as conditions or objectives change. Along with policy statements, these definitions are a set of general operating guidelines and a base for program planning.

It is intended to sustain at an effective level staff participation in operational planning and review so that this initial effort will not gradually become a legendary event unrelated to the continuing service commitment of the Libraries. This work is seen as an initial and intensive experience in a movement toward a participative environment in which the staff will be personally involved in the ultimate purpose of the Libraries, by comprehension of both institutional purpose and their personal role in achieving it.

The case study was undertaken in part because the present dynamic nature of academic and research libraries dictates the need to make them more flexible and responsive to change. The study and the subsequent implementation effort have generated a climate and potential for change in the new organization. The unit definitions were prepared as a description of the organization at time zero. The change in organization and operating patterns implies change in individual staff and administrative behavior as well. It would be unrealistic and undesirable to expect these changes to occur abruptly. Rather, they will come with education, individual exploration of alternate approaches, testing of new personnel procedures, and gradual movement towards improved effectiveness. The capability and desire to change varies greatly among individuals; thus it is important that each individual be able to choose growth patterns consistent with his own personal and career objectives.

The new organization is the starting point for the evolutionary change which the case study and restructuring were intended to permit. As objectives and performance are reviewed, the results will possibly prompt changes in the details of the organization and even structural relationships, since organization forms and staffing patterns are means to ends rather than ends in themselves.

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